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American School  
of Classical Studies  
at Athens

A SERIES OF SCULPTURES FROM CORINTH

[PLATE V]

I. HELLENIC RELIEFS

THAT the excavations at Corinth should yield but scanty returns to the student of sculpture is natural. The sack of the town by Mummius in 146 B.C., and the wholesale removal to Rome of such sculptures as escaped destruction, left little hope for important remains from the Greek period. The new Roman town was of course adorned with a multitude of cult statues, votive offerings, and decorative sculptures, but even these have met with unusually rough handling. At such places as Delphi, Olympia, and Epidaurus circumstances were favorable for the preservation at least of works in marble, for as the old cults lost their hold the precincts were abandoned, and when the buildings became ruinous, the statues lay as they fell, protected by the débris above them. But at Corinth the site was continuously occupied; Romans of the empire, Franks, and Turks all took their turn at rebuilding, and old sculptures were valuable building material. So of the few works that have come down to us, the most were either built into Frankish or Byzantine walls (with such inconvenient projections as heads, hands, or attributes deliberately knocked away), or gathered together in fragments, ready to be burned for lime.<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite the small quantity, the material at hand represents in a modest way the whole development of Graeco-Roman sculpture, from the best Greek period to the close of the Roman Empire. We have fragments from the fifth cen-

<sup>1</sup> The deposit found in the theatre in 1904 seems to have been collected for a lime-kiln.

tury B.C., from the fourth century, from the Hellenistic period, and from early and late Roman times.

In the best Greek period (fifth and fourth centuries) may safely be placed three relief fragments,—presumably all from grave-monuments.<sup>1</sup>

1. (Fig. 1.) Inventory No. 729. Found April 13, 1897, "a little east of Pirene and north by 10 m." Fragment of relief with a head in profile. Marble fine-grained, granulated by weathering, best preserved on neck.

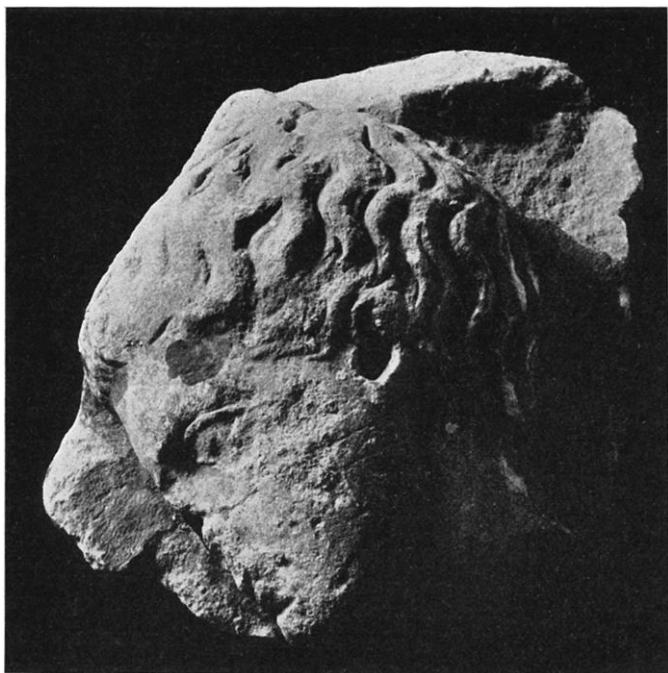


FIGURE 1. — RELIEF FROM CORINTH.

Projecting portions (locks, edge of ear, sides of lips) much worn, nose chipped away. Fragment broken on all the edges; back of slab rough-hewn. Length of face from upper edge of forehead to chin, 0.103 m.; breadth from bridge of nose to ear, 0.066 m.; maximum height of relief, 0.043 m.

Since the slab nowhere presents an original outer edge, we have no means of determining the exact motive of the figure

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the one other fragment from good Greek times, found at Corinth before the time of the American excavations, is also a grave fragment, presumably of the fourth century. Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 751; Loewy, *Ath. Mitt.* 1886, p. 150 and pl. V.

nor the part it played in the composition of the relief as a whole. The head was certainly bent forward about as shown in the illustration. That it belonged to a young girl can be inferred from the peculiar style of hair-dressing, with the locks brushed up loosely from all sides and caught in a little knot on the top of the head. A similar coiffure is worn by two figures on Attic grave reliefs,<sup>1</sup> both of whom wear the long, ungirt tunic usual for very young girls. One of these, the Nikagora,<sup>2</sup> is standing alone looking down at a bird in her hands. The other<sup>3</sup> is attendant on a seated figure, mother or older sister rather than mistress, to whom she hands a jewel-box. In the case of our head there is nothing to determine whether it belonged to the principal figure or to an attendant. In the latter case, the figure was of course standing; in the former case, probably so; for on monuments of very young boys and girls the seated figure is not found.

The fact that we possess only the head also increases the difficulty of any attempt to place the monument in a definite school and period. For it is in the torso and drapery that the distinctions between Attic work and that of northern Greece or Boeotia come out most strongly. The quality of the relief, however, suggests Attic work. Worn as the fragment is, the values are perfect; the planes drop into exactly the right relations; the details are indicated firmly, yet without excessive eagerness. The whole is marked by the quiet mastery of form, the evenness of workmanship, that is one of the surest indications of the Attic chisel. This general impression cannot be supported by any details of mannerism. The mouth, one of the most characteristic Attic features, is so marred as to be useless for purposes of comparison. And one technical detail, if it has any significance, points away from Athens. There are two modes of rendering a profile head common in Attic relief. Either the artist modelled only the side of the face next the spectator and made the transition from the plane of the nose and the forehead to the background by means of a vertical

<sup>1</sup> Also by one of the daughters of Peleus in the Lateran relief.

<sup>2</sup> Athens, Nat. Mus. 894. Conze, *Att. Grabreliefs*, 826.

<sup>3</sup> High relief in the Karapanos collection. Athens, Nat. Mus. Conze, *Att. Grabreliefs*, 71.

boundary plane, as is done in many instances on the Parthenon frieze; or, when the relief was higher, he rendered the whole front face, giving the further side a more sketchy treatment and possibly less depth. In our relief, on the other hand, though it is so low that one might expect the sharp vertical outline, we find the further side of the face represented as if cut through by the background, so that the eye is bisected and the corner of the mouth cut off. The only parallel for this treatment which I can now recall is a non-Attic stele of the fifth century—that of Diadora of Thespieae.<sup>1</sup> Despite this technical peculiarity, the general quality of the head is such that I still incline to call it Attic.

Its date would probably fall in the third quarter of the fifth century B.C. Though the distance from the front plane to the background is relatively considerable, the relief is handled as if it were low.<sup>2</sup> The inner edge of the eye is actually on a lower plane than the outer, yet the eye on the whole is nearly parallel to the relief-plane; and the tear-duct is just barely visible to one standing at the normal point of view. Both these qualities, the low relief, often “stilted out,” as it were, from the background, and the profile eye rendered as if from a front view, characterize the Parthenon frieze and the grave-reliefs, Nos. 714 and 716 in the National Museum at Athens,<sup>3</sup> made directly under its influence. They tend to disappear toward the end of the century in the period of which the Nike balustrade is the characteristic expression.

So far, then, as can be judged from the fragment, the relief was Attic work, of the decade just after 440, and contained at least one figure of a girl, standing.

2. (Fig. 2.) Inventory No. 858, “found July 27, 1905, near the dump of 1904.” Piece of thin slab with fragment of face in low relief. Marble rather coarse-grained; takes yellowish patina. Broken diagonally across the upper edge of the forehead to the bridge of the nose and from the temples to the chin, so that eye, nose, and mouth remain intact; all of chin excepting very front portion chipped away. Surface has weathered and become somewhat granular, and on lower part of cheek flaked away a little with the grain of the marble.

<sup>1</sup> Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 818.

<sup>2</sup> The height from the background is actually 0.042 m., but all the modelling effective from the normal point of view is crowded into a height of 0.027 m.

<sup>3</sup> Conze, *Att. Grabreliefs*, 321 and 293.

Finish probably never high; marks of chisel around eye-socket and wing of nostril. Edges of planes, however, still clean-cut, except for bruise on



FIGURE 2. — RELIEF FROM CORINTH.

tip of nose and upper lip. Back of slab finished smooth. Maximum length of fragment, 0.16 m.; length of nose, 0.06 m.; length of chin and lips, 0.06 m.; height of relief (so far as can be measured from existing portion of background), is 0.015 m.; thickness of slab, 0.02 m. to 0.26 m.

That the head comes from a grave-stele is very probable. The finish of the back and the slight depth of the relief in proportion to its size preclude the possibility of regarding it as architectural sculpture, while the large size and the furrow under the eye, evidently intended to express grief, are inappropriate to a votive relief.<sup>1</sup> A fragment still remaining on the

edge of the forehead shows that the hair was brushed back in waves from the temples, hence the face was that of a woman.

Its rendering is marked by certain strongly defined traits, resulting from an endeavor to carry out laws which the artist did not fully grasp. The planes of forehead and cheek are held carefully parallel to that of the background. Even the eye is not only drawn as if in full front, with the lachrymal gland carefully wrought out, but set with the outer and inner corners at almost the same level. There is, moreover, an evident effort to keep the bounding surfaces, at least the bridge of nose, the

<sup>1</sup> The only instance known to the writer of a large votive relief of good Greek period is the Eleusinian relief in the National Museum at Athens (No. 126).

forehead, and the outer edge of the cheek, in touch with an ideal front plane, instead of letting them fall one behind another in natural perspective. Yet with all this there is nothing of the clumsy layer-like effect of the early Laconian stelae.<sup>1</sup> The individual features are shapely and firm in modelling; the mouth, in particular, has that delicate crispness in the surfaces of the upper lip that is familiar in the best Attic work. There is no hesitation in the transitions from plane to plane, yet they are rendered with enough subtle gradation to save the work from any appearance of overemphasis, and to impart to the almost concave surfaces of the cheek a certain semblance of roundness. One trait that contributes to the air of refined decision in the head is the straight furrow, starting from the inner corner of the eye, a sign of grief familiar enough in Italian drawings, but rarely hinted at in even the most expressive of the Greek grave-stelae.

The nearest parallels for the relief are found in Attic work in the middle of the fifth century. The delicate definition of the rendering is a mark of the Attic chisel at all times; the special form chosen for the mouth (with the clear-cut lip of rather complicated outline) occurs in Attic sculpture from the days of the Discobolus down through the fourth century.<sup>2</sup> The single work with which it has most points of contact is perhaps the Eleusinian relief. Both show the same use of very low yet sharply outlined relief on a large scale, the same rather severe drawing, the same touches of lingering archaism both in the long eye and in the equality in length between the nose and the lower part of the face. The mouths of Demeter and Kore have been chipped away so that hardly more than their bare outlines remain, but in a relief of a youth in the Vatican,<sup>3</sup> which resembles the Eleusinian relief rather closely in other ways, the mouth has the characteristic shape seen in our head. One feels tempted to see in our head the same struggle of the last remnants of

<sup>1</sup> For example, the stele of Chrysapha, *Ath. Mitt.* II, pl. XX.

<sup>2</sup> To make clear to one's self the distinctive Attic form, one has only to compare the mouth of the Munich Oil-pourer with that of the Amazon of Cresilas or the Doryphorus.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson photograph, No. 1484.

archaism with the new freedom and richness of design as in the Eleusinian relief and to assign both to the same epoch; that is, contemporary with or just previous to the Parthenon frieze.

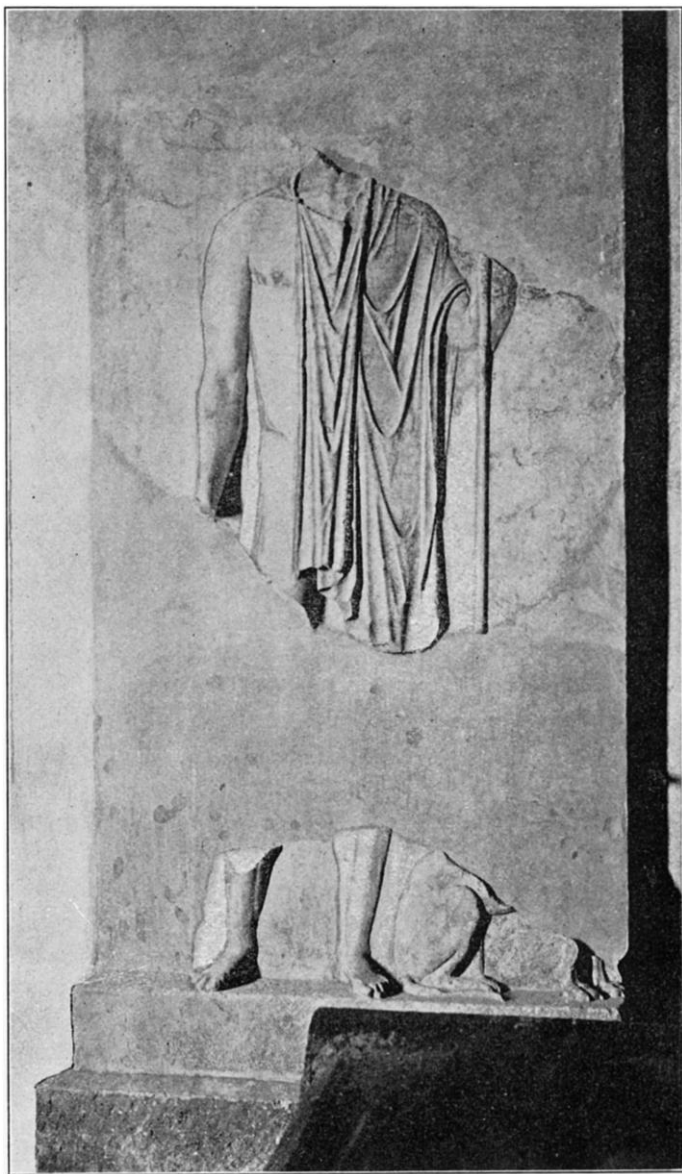
But there are certain points in which our head differs from the Eleusinian relief or any other Attic work. The eye, while carefully drawn, with even a little realistic touch in the fine folds under the lower lids, is set uncompromisingly in full-face. This peculiarity occurs, to be sure, in definitely archaic Attic work, like the stele of Aristion or the relief with the head of a discobolus, but in the earliest works of the freer style, as the Athena leaning on her spear or the oldest portions of the Parthenon frieze, it is already softened. In these latter the lachrymal gland is indeed represented, but the plane of the eye is made to bend more or less sharply toward the background at the inner corner. Thus the effect is nearer that of a true representation in profile. This softer rendering constitutes one of the differences between the Eleusinian relief and ours.

Further, the Eleusinian relief shares with all Attic work from the time of the Athena leaning on her spear a certain sense of perspective in the management of the planes. However low the relief, one feels the regular gradations of distance from the highest point to the background; the features fall into their proper places, and there results that sense of a well-ordered whole, of mastery in technique, which forms so essential a part of the specific Attic charm. In the head under consideration, as we have seen, just that sense of perspective is lacking. The well-wrought separate features — eye, lips, nostrils — are set in an almost flat surface, a cheek which is raised from the background no more than is the ridge of the nose, and sometimes actually less. The lowness of the modelling as a whole and the refinement of the transitions disguise somewhat this uncertain handling of relief conventions, but the moment one compares this head with a genuine Attic work, its defects are plain.

Flatness of relief combined with archaism in the representation of the eye are found in various non-Attic sculptures, especially those of Northern Greece. Philis<sup>1</sup> and the youth from

<sup>1</sup> Louvre; Brunn-Bruckmann, *Denkm.* No. 232 a.





RELIEF FROM CORINTH.

Pella<sup>1</sup> unite these traits with charm of design, the Thessalian youth with a hare,<sup>2</sup> and Polyxena<sup>3</sup> show them with cruder workmanship. But none of these other examples have the freshness and strong individuality that characterizes our relief. The delicate emphasis on the tear-worn furrow of the cheek may not be Attic, but it certainly is not Thessalian or Boeotian. On the whole, the work seems to stand alone: in execution, not disciplined to perfect technique, yet able to absorb much of the Attic refinement; in expression, fresh and independent.

3. (Plate V.) Very different in form, but not altogether in character, is the third stele.

Inventory No. 187. Found May 2, 1900, west of the propylaea, depth not stated. Lower part of relief, representing legs and feet of a man, and hind quarters of a dog. Feet rest on a plinth 0.155 m. high and 0.134 m. deep. Maximum height of relief-ground above plinth, 0.297 m.; full width not preserved, but from intact right end to broken left, 0.86 m.

Inventory No. 126. Found May 16, 1900, west of propylaea, 3 m. north of tall martyra. Part of same relief, containing torso from neck to middle of thighs. Full breadth of stele preserved, 1.047 m. Length of figure from pit of neck to inner edge of break on right thigh, 0.828 m.; breadth of shoulders, 0.40 m.; pit of neck to nipples, 0.165 m.

The two pieces do not, of course, fit by contact, but the motive, dimensions, and workmanship leave no doubt that they belong together. Not only does the position of the leg in the lower half of the relief correspond with the thigh in the upper, but even the shaft of the hunting-spear reappears just behind the dog's hind legs. The surface is in excellent preservation. The plinth on both faces is dressed rough, as if with a coarse-toothed chisel. The background is slightly roughened by long, very shallow furrows, made by some blunt instrument; the flesh, though smooth and firm, has not the crystalline quality of the best Attic work, nor is it sharply distinguished in texture from the drapery. The difference between the two in effect is due to the fact that the flesh offers broader, unbroken surfaces to reflect the light, rather than to any essential variation in rendering. Both flesh and drapery show fine chisel marks almost like cross-hatching, which, so far as I can tell, disappear

<sup>1</sup> Constantinople; Brunn-Bruckmann, *Denkm.* No. 232 b.

<sup>2</sup> Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 741.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 733.

in the parts of the flesh that come into highest light, and grow deeper in the shadowed portions or those farthest away from the spectator.

The relief represents a youth standing with both feet on the ground, and the weight thrown somewhat on the left foot. He leans a little on the long shaft, presumably a hunting-spear, which he holds with bent left arm. The right arm hangs quietly at his side. He wears a short chlamys, caught on the left shoulder, and hanging in limp folds over the breast and left side, while the right side is bare. The head is gone, but so far as one can judge from the remains of the neck, must have been erect and turned very slightly to the left side. Beside the youth sits his dog. The upper part of the body and the head are missing, but all four feet and the tail rest motionless on the plinth, so that it seems as if the head must have been at rest, too, looking quietly off to the right.

The motive of the youth with his dog is familiar in late sixth century and in fifth century work, from the time of the stele of Alxenor<sup>1</sup> to that of the "Agathokles"<sup>2</sup> or a somewhat later instance from Thespieae.<sup>3</sup> So far as I know, the motive is non-Attic. With the exception of one found at Carystus,<sup>4</sup> the instances which I have counted in the National Museum are all from Boeotian towns—Orchomenus, Thespieae, Tanagra.<sup>5</sup> From the motive as developed in this group our stele differs in spirit. In the Boeotian stelae the dog is an essential part of the composition. He appears as the comrade of the youth, stretching up his head toward his master in play, or at least to receive an absent-minded caress. And the youth himself is pictured in a moment of idleness, resting after the gymnasium (Agathokles, stele from Tanagra), or lounging in the agora (Naples and Orchomenus stelae). But in the Corinthian relief the dog is no longer a playmate, but a part of the hunter's equipment. Both master and hound stand motionless, staring off into space, waiting but not alert, more like heraldic symbols of the chase

<sup>1</sup> Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 742.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 829.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 730.

<sup>5</sup> I have not included certain instances where the dog formed a subordinate motive, as in the fine fourth century group in Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 869, nor others where children were playing with dogs, but have confined my list to the grown youth with the dog.

than a group knit by any warm impulse of shared activity. This cold immobility marks off our relief not only from the Boeotian series, but also from the whole range of stelae of the good period. The monuments of the fifth and fourth centuries owe their greatest charm to the fact that they are not general and "statuesque" in character, but that each one seems to have caught its own special aspect from actual life; that each presents a definite action with all the suppleness and ease of unconscious motion. Even when, as in the Melite<sup>1</sup> or the Tynnias,<sup>2</sup> the action does not involve movement, it still has its individual aspect, still is spontaneous. Tynnias is not posing as the type of a dignified Athenian citizen. He has sunk naturally into his chair, and one sympathizes with his pleasant thrill of relaxation as he allows his shoulders to droop forward a little and his arm to lie inert across his lap. The figure is full of nobility, but it is that of a real man, caught in an unconscious moment. Melite, too, whose pose is the nearest of any to that of our Corinth figure, is no mere type, but a woman of definite personality, who has thrown herself for a moment against a convenient pillar, and looks out challengingly at the passer-by. In contrast to this freedom and individuality, the Corinthian figure has the unbending remoteness of a cult statue. Even the drapery has stiffened in sympathy, and hangs in the folds to which its own weight has dragged it, unstirred by any motion or breath of wind.

In execution as well as in motive, the artist differs from his Attic and Boeotian contemporaries. He has learned from them neither the proportions of the human figure nor the laws of relief, and in consequence is wavering in his grasp on both. He has placed the lower edge of the breast very little below the armpit, and in his struggle to crowd the feet upon the plinth without adequate foreshortening, has made them about two-thirds their normal length.<sup>3</sup> His embarrassments with relief-technique are seen not only in a choice of a pose which compels him to represent the feet either foreshortened or too small, but also in the unsuccessful perspective of the torso. The figure is outlined

<sup>1</sup> Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 720.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 902.

<sup>3</sup> Length, measured on the inside of the foot, 0.15 m.; normal length of foot, on basis of estimated height of 1.84 m., should be 0.23 m.

as if for a full front view; that is, the median line from the pit of the neck to the navel divides the torso into two approximately equal halves. But as if from a wish to correct the "frontality" of the drawing by the modelling, the left side is in very low relief, while the right arm and thigh are almost in the round. The same inequality may be noticed in the dog, whose tail lies out along the plinth in full round, while his body is rendered in very low relief. Another instance of technical groping is the deep undercutting of the mantle just over the abdomen on the right side, and between the legs. In the former instance the modelling in the crevice can be seen only by looking at the stele in sharp profile, a point of view with which the artist certainly did not need to reckon; in the latter, even supposing the stele were to be seen from below, the cutting is twice as deep as necessary.

Yet the relief has nothing mechanical about it. Its stiffness and timidity are such as are natural in the work of an artist a little baffled by the laws of his craft, who yet works lovingly at every bit of his surface, who insists on studying his drapery afresh, even though the result be less pleasing than if he had taken a scheme ready-made from his predecessors; and who occasionally attains to such exquisite bits of modelling as the right arm of the figure or the haunches of the dog.

As for the period, a piece of provincial work must be dated by its most advanced traits, not by its archaisms. The handling of the drapery, which clings close to the figure along the left side, and breaks in a series of triangular folds with wavering surface, can hardly, I think, be earlier than the epoch of the Nike balustrade and the grave-relief of the lad with the bird-cage,<sup>1</sup> the style of work which one dates in the last decades of the fifth century. The mistaken attempt to give the figure perspective by varying the height of the relief on the two sides and by making the lower relief pass by slight transitions into the background, instead of being sharply outlined against it, belong also to the later years of the fifth century. As such innovations penetrate a little more slowly to provincial ateliers, I should incline to date the work at about the end of the fifth or beginning of the fourth century.

<sup>1</sup> Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 715.

It is for private commissions like funeral or votive reliefs that foreign workmen are least likely to be employed; hence it is here, if anywhere, that one may look for indications of a native Corinthian school. The material at hand is scanty; we have but four<sup>1</sup> reliefs, one of which (No. 1) is almost surely Attic, and another, that in the National Museum at Athens, offers too many abnormal traits to be very valuable as evidence. On such a basis one dares not formulate conclusions, but I cannot resist pointing out that our numbers 2 and 3 have in common a certain undisciplined power of observation, a certain wayward sensitiveness to beauty which leads to the selection of lovely or vividly expressive detail, while both lack the power of composition and the technical mastery which fuse the details into a finished whole.

The preceding pieces were indubitably Greek, and can be attributed to the fifth or the early part of the fourth century. To the fourth century or early Hellenistic period probably belongs the maenad basis published by Dr. Richardson in this *Journal* (VIII, 1904, pp. 291 ff.), a piece which shows boldness and grace of design and masterly handling of texture, but lacks anatomical correctness and restraint in the management of the relief.

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<sup>1</sup> I include the relief in Athens, Nat. Mus. No. 751; see above, p. 1, note 2.